

BEFORE THE ICE IN THE TEA MELTS

Sometimes
when she was mad at my father
my mother fell in love with
Van Heflin, Joseph Cotten
and Perry Como
and said how she'd be a
much better wife to Van Heflin
than Bette Davis was in that dump
in "Beyond the Forest,"
and better than Marilyn Monroe was
to Joseph Cotten in "Niagara"
because she would never leave
a good man for another man
no matter how rich and handsome he was
but she wasn't so sure that she,
a Texas Baptist, would make a
better wife for Perry Como,
an Italian Catholic,
and she wasn't so sure
she'd like reeking of garlic, olive oil,
and wine all the time
or that Perry Como would like
her fried chicken, mashed potatoes
and cream gravy, biscuits, and iced tea
all the time like my father did
and when we heard my father's
car door slam, and our
dog whine at the front door,
my mother always said, hurry up
and mash the potatoes
before the ice in the tea melts.

THE COOLEST CAR IN SCHOOL

Wearing a white chiffon waltz-length
gown with seed pearls on the bodice
and white gardenias on my wrist
I went to my junior prom with Vic Shermer
in the aquamarine leather tuck-and-roll back seat
of Tinker Christensen's white '56 Olds,
Tinker taking my girlfriend Jan
in the front seat. Tinker's Olds,
the coolest car in school, Tinker
waxing, polishing, and hand-customizing it
every night after his job at the supermarket,
us cruising in it, actually cruising,
listing like a yacht in tropical seas,
tradewind-blown as a schooner in moon rivers,
down Firestone Boulevard in that lowered,

white-glowing car, all of us glowing,
Jan in powder-blue taffeta, Tinker
in a powder-blue tux, Vic Shermer
in a white one, on our way to the prom,
and then the Moulin Rouge in Hollywood
where even the movie stars envied that car,
and then on the way home, gliding in our barge
along the Nile of the Hollywood Freeway,
the moon our wish lamp, the stars
our diamond dust, Vic Shermer,
without asking, surprised me by kissing
my naked back, smack in between
my bare shoulder blades.

Later, all grown up, I would ride
in Corvettes, Cadillacs and limos,
Rolls Royces, Benzs, Mustangs, Zees,
a Pantera, and an XKE, and men,
as handsome or more handsome
than Vic Shermer, would wine and dine me
and kiss my naked back,
but never again would it feel like that,
and never again
would the moon, pearls, or gardenias
glow as white,
or a '56 Olds shine in the night
as that night when our eyes
were as aquamarine and young
as Tinker's leather tuck-and-roll.

MUTE FORCE

When they dropped the A-bombs
on Japan, I was too little
to do anything about it
and had to believe what the grown-ups said
about them deserving it,
us the good guys safe and sound
in our living room watching the newsreel
on my father's home movie projector,
Tommy Dorsey's "Boogie Woogie"
playing on the record player
my father's irony, that '78
for background music, his sense of fair play
as the mushroom clouds boomed silently
shattering the eardrums, tongues, bones,
and souls of all those invisible,
deserving human beings
as images of teen-aged jitterbuggers
filled our minds

bombclouds and boogiers forever binding in mine